

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5217

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation, February 19, 2007

Title: An act relating to operation and maintenance of open space, agricultural, and timber lands acquired through the conservation futures program.

Brief Description: Allowing counties to increase funding for properties acquired through conservation futures.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen and Pridemore.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/08/07, 2/19/07 [DPS-WM, DNP, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5217 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Poulsen and Spanel.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Stevens.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Swecker.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: The conservation futures tax is a local option property tax assessed at the county level, at a maximum rate of 6.25 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. Revenue from the tax may be used to purchase development rights for open space, agricultural, and timber lands. The tax was enacted to help fund the preservation of these lands in light of increasing urban and metropolitan development. Up to 15 percent of these tax revenues may be used for maintenance and operation of parks and recreational facilities. Revenues may not be used to supplant existing sources of maintenance and operation funding. Counties with populations exceeding 100,000 must develop a process to ensure that the tax is distributed throughout the county.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is neither a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

All rights or interests in real property acquired with conservation futures tax revenues must be located within the assessing county. Counties are encouraged to use a portion of the conservation futures tax revenues as one tool for salmon preservation. If the property rights acquired with conservation futures tax revenues diminish the ability of a county to accommodate planned growth, the county must adopt reasonable measures to restore the lost growth capacity. County legislative authorities in rural counties may authorize a ballot proposition asking the voters to determine whether the county may make a one-time emergency reallocation of unspent conservation futures funds to pay for other county government purposes. A majority of the voters voting on the measure is required for passage. This provision expires July 1, 2008.

Summary of Bill: The county levy amount for conservation futures is raised to 12 1/2 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The portion of the proceeds of this tax from the previous year that maybe used for the maintenance and operation of parks and recreational land is raised to 23 percent.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED SUBSTITUTE AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): It is clarified that those jurisdictions already imposing the conservation futures tax may raise that property tax up to a maximum of 12 1/2 cents per \$1,000 assessed valuation without a vote of the people.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Thousands of acres of critical habitat and open space land have been protected with these conservation futures levies. In Clark County there is a match of almost 90 cents for each one dollar of tax to help keep up with the appreciation in land values and to help maintain these valuable lands. These tax monies are the reason why the state's major lake and river systems are protected for salmon and steelhead. The ability to implement regional recovery strategies has protected the full range of the life stages of these fish. Parks, especially, struggle for resources to keep up with maintenance. The local option for jurisdictions to increase the tax and to increase the amount going to maintenance and operations is a real success story.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Patrick Lee, Clark County; Bill Dygert, citizen; Criag Larsen, City of Redmond.